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L.A.'s \$300-million voting system gets high marks as votes trickle in across California



Los Angeles County voters waiting in line on election day at a voting center in Norwalk. (Frederic J. Brown / AEP)



L.A. County voters waiting in line on election day at a voting center in Norwalk. (Frederic J. Brown / AFP)

By MATT STILES | STAFF WRITER

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Los Angeles County's \$300-million election system is receiving high marks for performing without any serious problems during the recent election, a sharp turnaround from the March primary, when the newly unveiled infrastructure created long lines and significant delays at the polls.

Speaking to the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, Registrar-Recorder Dean Logan, the county's top elections official, pronounced the new system a "success" and earned praise from the same panel that [grilled him](#) in March about the problems during the primary.

Logan told the supervisors that his office had worked diligently to fix problems since conducting a review of the technology breakdowns in the primary. He said voter behavior also helped, with many voters opting to vote by mail or vote early at the polls, which relieved the strain on new electronic poll books that caused major delays in March.

"Our long-term investment and hard work in L.A. County was worth it," he said. "The execution of this election was successful."

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Meanwhile across the state, mail ballots are still trickling in as election officials in other counties continue counting millions of votes. This has delayed a final nationwide popular vote tally in the presidential contest and delayed the results in two key Southern California congressional races.

The [latest count](#), released Tuesday evening by the California secretary of state, showed that roughly 1.5 million ballots — including 1.1 million cast by mail — remain uncounted by counties, which tally and report their results at varying paces to the state. The final tally isn't expected until Dec. 3.



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Voters in L.A. County heeded warnings about in-person voting complications and delays that they experienced in March, and they decided to cast the majority of their ballots by mail — a first for Los Angeles County.

While ballots are still trickling in and the [tallying continues](#), about 3.4 million voters in Los Angeles County — [roughly 80%](#) — cast vote-by-mail ballots either through the postal service of drop boxes. That's more than double the rate of the 2016 presidential election.

Perhaps just as important, more than half of the 850,000 voters who did cast their ballots at voting centers did so early. The final turnout figure stood at about 72% as of Tuesday evening, with at least 142,000 ballots left to count.

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Supervisor Janice Hahn, who was a vocal critic in March and urged Logan to review issues that sparked long lines and anger from voters, said she agreed with his assessment. She said voters had a “good experience” this time.

“I’m hopeful that March was just a hiccup and that our elections going forward will be as smooth as this one,” she said.

The pandemic was a major factor in changing voter behavior this year.

It prompted officials to mail ballots to all the state’s registered voters, not just those who requested them. And ballots received by Nov. 20 can still be counted so long as they were postmarked by election day. Officials are also allowing voters extra time to fix any deficiencies in their mail ballots, such as mismatched or missing signatures.

In addition, voters were allowed to register on election day, leading to hundreds of thousands of conditional votes statewide.



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The extra time to count the votes has clouded the results in three closely watched and undecided congressional elections in California, including two in Southern California. Still, the vast majority of votes — precisely how many is unknown — have most likely already been cast, experts say.

“I would be very surprised if many more ballots come in at this point,” said Mindy Romero, who directs the [Center for Inclusive Democracy](#) at USC whose team has [studied the L.A. County vote closely](#). “We’ve got a lot of ballots still out there. I think, though, that the picture will become clearer in the next couple of days.”

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In the race for the 39th Congressional District in Orange County, Young Kim, the Republican, [held a narrow lead](#) over the incumbent, U.S. Rep. Gil Cisneros, a Democrat. And Democratic Assemblywoman Christie Smith [maintained a narrow advantage](#) in the race for the 25th Congressional District, in northern Los Angeles County, over the incumbent, U.S. Rep. Mike Garcia, a Republican.

Election experts said the county’s voting system in Los Angeles appears to have met its high expectations, even while changing long-held routines and habits developed around election night.

“The big thing is, you don’t really know how a new electoral system is going to play until you test in practice,” said Kevin Wallsten, professor of political science at Cal State Long Beach. “It seems like L.A. County, in particular, performed pretty well.”

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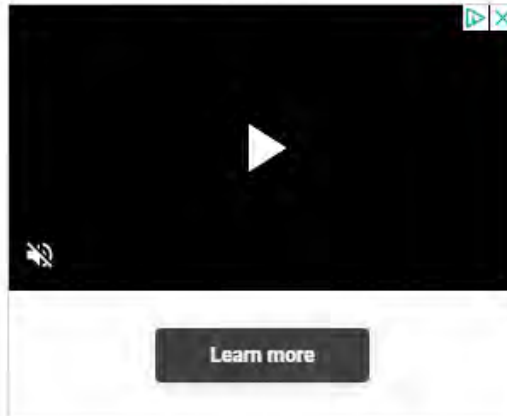
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